



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

SELF-GUIDED WORKBOOK FOR PARKS AND RECREATION



NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park

INTRODUCTION

DEVELOPING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Our nation faces many challenges, including an economic recession, racial inequities, increasing and worsening weather events related to climate change, and a global health crisis. Parks and recreation has become an essential service to our communities, providing healing, refuge and relief from these pressing issues. The resiliency of our profession requires a dedication to making the field of parks and recreation reflective of our diverse nation and a preferred career path for the next generation. As we reposition the field and expand our efforts to support community well-being, we also will increase the number of community-based environmental stewards and allies for parks and recreation.

Workforce development refers to the system that helps people gain employment. Within the field of parks and recreation, as one of the largest employers of first-time workers, we have long been providing some level of workforce development. Whether it has been hiring seasonal staff for lifeguarding, recreation programs, park maintenance or facility management, our entry-level positions provide a great opportunity to learn both job and essential skills while boosting the self-esteem and capacity of our young

employees. Recently, with our efforts to guide adults who are new to the profession into career pathways, there has been an increase in opportunities to address broader social issues, such as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The reality is, your agency already has been doing aspects of workforce development. The question is: How can you intentionally grow these efforts?

As the profession looks to build strong, healthy and resilient communities, we will need a diverse workforce that is well prepared to tackle the emerging and future challenges. To do this, we must consider how to harness our skills in such areas as programming, mentoring, youth development and partnership building to intentionally design and grow workforce development programs that ultimately lead to refined career pathways and creation of a network of allies.

Getting there requires us to begin to layer more components of workforce development (see NRPA's [Workforce Development: A Resource Guide for Parks and Recreation](#)). But before we grow our programming efforts and career pipelines, it is worth pausing to reflect and assess where you are as an individual, as an agency, and as a community.



Group of young professionals in a meeting. Photo courtesy of Dreamstime.com.

As part of NRPA's commitment to supporting innovative ways to engage and prepare the future workforce, this self-guided workbook provides a place for reflection and growth along with guidance on how to develop or renovate a workforce development program. This workbook can be used by an individual, with a team and even with community members. We encourage you to use this resource as a framework for identifying and addressing barriers to engaging with parks and recreation, and for determining your own readiness, the readiness of your agency, and the readiness of your community to embark on the journey to advance economic and workforce equity opportunities through a workforce development program.

There are five areas of consideration that you, your team and your community

partners can work through to achieve your goal of co-creating a meaningful and successful workforce development program. Depending on your goal and the work accomplished thus far, you may want to dig deeper into one or more areas. You will find recommended resources provided within the worksheets that will help you explore further.

The objective of this self-guided workbook is to provide guidance for identifying and reaching your goals for community-based workforce development in the field of parks and recreation.

The prompts and exercises on the following pages will help you become a catalyst for community resiliency, health and well-being and equity. Together, we can create a better life for everyone, but it begins with building a diverse and innovative workforce.

1

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

EXPLORING THE CONCEPT AND THE POTENTIAL OF GREEN JOBS

What do you mean when you say workforce development? What is the goal(s) you hope to achieve through a workforce development program? In order to build a program, you need a clear statement of purpose and intention. This will allow you to return to a “true north” again and again, and it will help you assess if your goal(s) are being reached or if they have changed over time.

As you consider the following prompts, try to answer each prompt at the individual, department/agency and community level. What gaps and opportunities exist that each partner can address?

DEFINE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Broadly, workforce development has been defined as “the coordination of public- and private- sector policies and programs that provides individuals with the opportunity for a sustainable livelihood and helps organizations achieve exemplary goals, consistent with the societal context.”¹ Based on this definition, are there programs in your department/agency that accomplish parts of this already? Jot down those programs in the space below. What parts of these programs would you like to emulate? What would you like to do differently?

¹ Jacobs, R.L. (2006). Perspectives on adult education, human resource development, and the emergence of workforce development. *Development*, 20 (1), 21-31.

TECHNICAL JOB SKILLS

Think about what technical jobs skills you are offering or you want to offer. Draft a list of these skills below.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Essential skills, or soft skills, are the social and professional norms required to navigate the contemporary workplace, such as, professionalism, cultural sensitivity and decision making. What essential skills do you believe are critical for a workforce development program? Draft a list of these skills below.

Things to Consider

Green infrastructure and green jobs are increasingly being implemented in our communities as a way to use nature-based methods to address environmental issues, but did you know these activities also provide health, social and economic benefits?

If you are interested in learning more about green infrastructure and green jobs, check out these resources from NRPA:

- [Green Infrastructure Evaluation Framework](#) — Offers tools and research-based information to measure the environmental, social, economic and health benefits of green infrastructure projects.
- [Greener Parks for Health Advocacy Toolkit](#) — Offers key actions tailored to specific audiences to advance cross-sector solutions for implementing greener parks.



2

COMMUNITY VOICES

CENTERING CO-CREATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Co-creation of workforce development programs that include and center on the community from the very beginning end up being stronger and more innovative. Why? Instead of creating a solution to a problem we think might exist, collaborating with our community members ensures that we are addressing the actual problem with a better, targeted, solution. Including the perspectives of community members throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of these programs leads to richer, more authentic programs that truly are for the community.

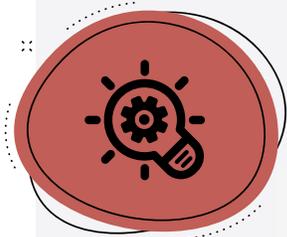
IDENTIFY ALLIES

Are there existing youth advisory boards or community groups that you could invite into the process? Is there a key gatekeeper or connector in the community? Draft a list of these essential allies below. Then identify who is missing from the conversation, and how can they be included?

Who Do You Know?

NRPA has many resources to help you build community and engage advocates, including:

- [Community Needs Assessment Resource](#) — A four step process that will help you create, administer and act on a high-quality community needs assessment.
- [Community Engagement Resource Guide](#) — A roadmap to implement equitable and inclusive community engagement strategies.
- [Parks for Inclusion Policy Guide](#) — Creating and adopting a formal inclusion policy is a great way to ensure that your facilities, programs and activities are accessible, welcoming and inclusive; this resource can help you create your own.



3

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)

REBUILDING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

As stated in the NRPA report, *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Parks and Recreation*, "Inequity is the ultimate challenge facing our nation, and parks and recreation can make a profound difference." Everyone is at a different place in their DEI journey, for this is not a journey of perfection, but rather one of continuous progress and growth. Equity-centered approaches can help dismantle racist systems and policies. Getting started with this requires individuals, agencies and communities to embrace a growth mindset and examine ways in which racial inequities persist and shape health, education and employment.

Many structural procedures create barriers to engaging a wider community audience. Think about where and how your job announcements are distributed. Are they even reaching a diverse audience? One of the benefits of co-creation with your community is uncovering strong social networks and solutions to information dissemination you likely don't know about.

We also can begin to create systems changes in how we shape our hiring competencies. In the same way new employees are assessed for technical skills, can we also begin to prioritize cross-cultural humility and competency as part of non-negotiable skills? Then go further. Can we begin to center trauma-informed processes throughout the agency — from the hiring process to trainings to reviews, to prompt healing — rather than re-traumatizing? By changing the dynamics of how we make policies, programs and decisions, we truly can begin to create and retain a new, increasingly inclusive workforce through a new, equitable work culture that will, in turn, ensure that the field of parks and recreation continues to remain vital and relevant to our communities.



Delve deeper.

No matter where you are in the journey, NRPA has several resources to help you center equity, including:

- [Creating Equity-based System Master Plans](#) — A tool to understand and center equity in park planning efforts.
- [Engaging Diverse Groups in Building Community Resiliency through Stewardship](#) — Coming Summer 2021
- [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Parks and Recreation Report](#) — A look at trends across the profession.

PRACTICE CENTERING EQUITY

Take this space to reflect on your own DEI journey, your agency's culture, and the equity movements in your community. Focus on the potential and celebrate the opportunities to make an impact toward a healthy, connected and resilient community.

Has there been a time where your silence was complicit in upholding inequity in your program or agency? What prevented you from showing up in allyship? How could you practice centering equity in a workforce development program? Why is that effort important?

4

ECONOMIC EQUITY

CREATING MORE THAN JUST JOB GROWTH

Workforce development programs can help address the economic disparities in our communities. The attainment of a first job in today's economy often means that person is providing critical support for the entire household to meet basic needs. As a field, we must consider how only offering seasonal and part-time jobs may not be attractive to a young workforce looking for financial stability. Consider how a career development pipeline might reposition your job openings. This conversation also encourages us to consider the role that our agencies play in helping to change intergenerational financial cycles. By providing workforce development programs along with our seasonal or part-time jobs, we can better prepare our communities for enduring and successful careers. The services we provide as a profession can deeply shift the economic outlook for our communities. Take a moment to consider your agency and your community. What opportunities are there for economic impact?

WHERE AND WHAT ARE THE ECONOMIC INEQUITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

HOW CAN YOU ADDRESS THESE INEQUITIES?

IS THERE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR YOUR PROGRAM?

Diversify your funding.

Generating economic equity requires capital. Here are some resources to help you identify a sustainable funding mechanism for your workforce development program:

- [Financing Green Infrastructure Projects](#) — Learn how to use a variety of funding approaches to bring green infrastructure and green jobs to your community.
- [Park and Recreation Professionals' Guide to Fundraising](#). — This guide will break down the daunting task of fundraising and help you diversify your funding sources.



5

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

REALIZING IT IS ALL CONNECTED

The convergence of race and socioeconomic status in the United States has been shown to lead to health inequities. For instance, a phenomenon termed the zip code effect indicates that where you live is the single best predictor of your life expectancy. According to the Center for American Progress, in the United States, the historic impact of redlining practices means that many communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are three times more likely than white neighborhoods to live in nature-deprived places.

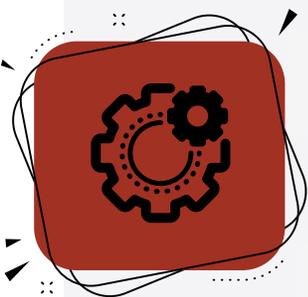
Ample research has shown that nature is incredibly important for psychological, physiological and social health. Parks and recreation is an important aspect of the public health system. By creating equitable access to parks, trails and other nature spaces, we are ensuring that all community members can benefit from time spent outdoors.

Time in nature also has been shown to promote environmental stewardship. Connecting communities to nature not only improves health, but it also can generate new environmentalists and nature stewards. These new allies then become important advocates for climate change impact policies, green infrastructure, and reimagining what healthy communities look like today.

Build a health framework.

NRPA has many resources to help guide you as you think about how health inequities can be addressed and solved through parks and recreation, including:

- [Elevating Health Equity Through Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action](#) — Helps park and recreation professionals to intentionally advance health equity by applying a racial equity lens when designing, implementing and evaluating programs and services, and when developing infrastructure, maintenance and operation plans.
- [Best Practices Guide for Increasing Access to Health Foods through Innovative Approaches](#) — Provides strategies agencies can use in the implementation of three innovative program models to increase access to healthy foods.
- [Making the Case: Parks and Health](#) — Helps leaders show how parks are a critical part of the community's public health infrastructure.
- [Quantifying the Contribution of Public Parks to Physical Activity and Health](#) — Provides a look at the evidence of the role of parks in health.



MAPPING HEALTH INEQUITIES

Take a moment to consider the health of your community. What are the top noncommunicable diseases (such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, etc.) affecting your community?

Is there equitable distribution of parks and natural areas both in quantity and quality throughout the community?

Are the policies and programs such that all community members are welcomed?

What is the language being used around these nature spaces? Who in your community is being described when you use the words “conservationist,” “environmental steward,” “outdoor person,” and “nature lover?”

What are the top three health inequities that you could address in your community through a workforce development program?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, vibrant and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. With more than 60,000 members, NRPA advances this vision by investing in and championing the work of park and recreation professionals and advocates — the catalysts for positive change in service of equity, climate-readiness, and overall health and well-being.

NRPA brings strength to our message by partnering with like-minded organizations, including those in the federal government, nonprofits and commercial enterprises. Funded through dues, grants, registrations and charitable contributions, NRPA produces research, education and policy initiatives for our members that ultimately enrich the communities they serve.

NRPA places immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation and conducts research with two goals. First, NRPA creates and analyzes data to help park and recreation agencies make optimal decisions on operations, programming and spending. Second, NRPA develops data and insights that support park and recreation professionals making the case for greater and more stable funding to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public. The NRPA Research team works closely with internal subject matter experts, respected industry consultants and the academic community to develop its reports and data resources. Learn more at nrpa.org/Research.

AUTHORS

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